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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effects of reestablished or redefined core curriculum requirements on college speech communication programs, based on the survey responses of speech communication faculty members at 104 four-year schools. The following conclusions and recommendations are presented as a result of the survey: Although many employers consider communicative ability a necessary employment qualification, few of the schools surveyed indicated any need to place speech communication courses beyond the basic speech course in a core curriculum. Speech communication teachers need to emphasize more forcefully the ways in which their courses and programs fulfill students' needs. Cutbacks in enrollment and financial resources necessitate that speech faculties cooperate and collaborate with other departments. Speech communication course materials need to be reorganized, consolidating specialized courses with declining enrollments into a course that is broader in scope. Speech communication professionals must incorporate marketing concepts and strategies into their programs to insure that speech communication continues as an academic discipline. A summary of the survey data is attached. (RL)

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Re-Evaluation and the Core Curriculum: How Will Speech Communication Fare?

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Movement to Establish a Core Curriculum

"Colleges and universities across the country from Stanford and Harvard Universities to Marist College in Poughkeepsie... are re-appraising their undergraduate curricula."[1]

Many universities and colleges are defining once again for their undergraduate students what courses will constitute the common core of all programs of study.[2] While a few schools never abandoned a prescribed core curriculum during the sixties, many institutions did and are in the process now of moving back toward re-instatement of general education requirements.

Concern among university and college faculty and academic administrators that "we're turning out highly technical...people who are barbarians" was voiced in January of 1977 by Steven Muller, President of Johns Hopkins University.[3] Henry Rosovsky, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, called for a two-year review of undergraduate education, and as a result of the review, Dean Rosovsky's Report to the President "calls for a reform of Harvard's undergraduate curriculum."[4]

Pressures for reform of undergraduate college curricula have grown stronger steadily since the sixties. Throughout the sixties, university enrollments and budgets grew, and colleges and universities could afford expansionist academic programs. Students of speech communication, and other disciplines, were offered wide arrays of courses. Course content of many individual offerings became highly specialized. Students were abundant, and there came to be few required general education courses. Colleges tended to grant to students their demands to take whatever courses

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were "relevant". As the sixties turned into the early seventies, greater and greater numbers of students elected to take most of their course work in few areas of study, specialized toward vocational application.[5]

During the crest of the vocational movement in higher education, cries from personnel directors in industry who wanted to pay for no more on-the-job training programs for new graduates than they had to,[6] pressures from parents who wanted college training to guarantee "good jobs" for their sons and daughters upon graduation,[7] and legislatures demanding "accountability" from educational institutions all, during the late sixties and early seventies, pushed colleges toward more narrowly specialized, vocationally oriented curricula.[8]

In recent years, students have graduated from college with extremely specialized programs of study. Other students have dabbled in many disciplines, but the individual courses selected had become so specialized in content or chronology covered that these students, as well as those of narrow vocational orientation, left college without having received a comprehensive balanced education.

John Goldwin, former Dean of St. John's College and special assistant to Gerald Ford during the Ford presidency, said recently that

> There is more to living than earning a living, but many earn good livings by the liberal skills of analyzing, experimenting, discussing, reading, and writing. Skills that are always in demand are those of a mind trained to think and imagine and express itself...when the confidence of some is shaken, and many are confused about the direction the nation ought to follow in a new world situation... when the foundations of Western civilization are being challenged, and resolution seems to falter...we ought to not abandon liberal studies, but...redouble our commitment to that study, as if our lives depended on it.[9]

Those of us who work in the field of speech communication assist students in the development of the life skills that Muller, Goldwin, and a recent survey of employers insist must be acquired by college students before they graduate. Those of us in the field of speech communication work in the development of the basic skills of analysis and rational logic; we also help students, in some of our courses, to understand the history of the great ideas and strategies of our heritage.[10] We work not only in the development of student's abilities to think, organize, and speak with mission and clarity, but also to help students develop interpersonal skills. All of this work is basic to the goals of liberal education. Except for the basic course, however, speech communication, according to our survey of 104 colleges and universities, is being excluded from the core curriculum.

The Survey: A Look at our Condition

To survey what is happening to speech communication programs at a cross-section of colleges and universities throughout the country, members of the speech faculty at 104 four-year institutions were asked to respond to a questionnaire which asked for responses relating to:

1. Whether there is presently a prescribed core curriculum for all undergraduate students at their college.
2. If there is not presently a required core, whether the school plans or is in discussion regarding plans to move toward a prescribed core curriculum.
3. Whether the speech communication department/program is represented on policy-making committees or councils regarding the college-wide and/or university-wide curriculum of the school.
4. Whether speech communication faculty are aware of curriculum trends, nationally, regionally, and on their campuses.

5. Whether there is active movement, or planned movement, among speech communication faculty to insure awareness across their campuses of speech communication offerings.

6. Whether the speech communication faculty face at present steady state, growth, or decline of enrollments in their courses.

7. Whether the future holds probable departmental health and possible further development of programs in speech communication.

Of the 104 programs of speech communication surveyed, forty-six were surveyed by phone, and fifty-eight returned a questionnaire by mail. Fifteen of the schools were private colleges, and eighty-nine were tax supported, state assisted universities. The responses were analyzed by using SPSS Frequencies (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Discussion

Regarding whether their curriculum is undergoing change, 70% of the respondents reported their institutions to be revising curriculum; 11.5% did not answer that series of questions, and 18.5% responded that presently there is no active review of curriculum at their schools. Regarding whether current revision would result in a more highly prescribed curriculum, 31.8% said yes, 26.9% did not answer the question, and 35.6% responded that they are not aware of plans to make the curriculum more prescribed.

When asked whether the speech communication department or program has representation on institution-wide curriculum committees or councils, 72.1% said yes. When asked about concern among the faculty at their schools for better development of basic skills, 67.3% reported campus-wide discussion of the problem; 22.1% reported no perception of concern over curriculum in regard to basic skills.

When asked whether the concern for better development of basic skills could impact on the future of speech communication, 35.5% responded "yes" or "maybe", and 48.1% answered "no." Those who said that the concern for basic skills could impact on the speech communication program were asked to explain how this impact might occur; 63.5% responded they "didn't know", and 19.2% answered that the basic course could become required.

The survey included questions designed to reveal cooperation, collaboration, and competition as characterized by relationships, or the lack of working relationships, between speech communication faculty and faculty members of other programs and departments. The respondents were asked to describe any team teaching with faculty outside speech communication, courses in speech communication which are cross listed by other departments, any multi-departmental cross disciplinary projects underway, and any other indications of cooperation and collaboration between speech communication and other programs. In addition to asking the respondents to list courses in speech communication required and/or recommended as electives for non-speech majors by other departments, the questionnaire asked for examples of courses competitive to (of similar content) courses in speech communication. When competitive courses in other departments were listed, the respondent was asked to express his/her opinion as to how that competition had occurred and to predict what would happen in the future to competitive courses on that campus.

Of the 104 speech communication programs surveyed, 40.7% reported that at least one department, college, or school on campus requires their majors to take a fundamentals course in

speech communication; 19.5% responded that at least one department requires a course in public speaking, and 11.8% of the institutions has at least one program which requires majors to take a course in interpersonal communication. Only 14.3% reported that there is a college or university-wide requirement for students to take a course in speech communication. One of the best current clients of speech communication is the business program; 37.3% of the 104 speech communication programs in the survey reported that the business program requires at least one course in speech communication for all its majors.

The business program, however, was listed also as becoming increasingly a competitor to speech communication in the area of organizational communication. When asked why the organizational communication courses were offered competitively by departments of business, speech, psychology and occasionally by industrial engineering, speech communication faculty often reported personal and political disharmony between members of those departments, as well as displeasure with reported teaching methodology. No respondents knew, however, of actual observation of competitive courses by faculty from any of the departments involved in teaching similar courses.

Other programs besides business have been previously assumed to be supportive of the speech communication program, but are now emerging as competitors. Home economics and education were reported by the survey to be now marketing courses across campus and in the community via extension programs in "family communications" and "human relations communications". Colleges of home economics and education seek new students for faculty whose courses are no longer filled by their own majors. Sociology departments were often reported to be offering courses competitive to speech communication courses in interpersonal communication.

Cooperative and collaborative relationships reported take several forms. Courses in speech communication with empirical emphases are cross listed at a few institutions with business, management and marketing, with psychology, and in rare instances, with sociology. Other speech communication courses are cross listed with courses in journalism, English, media, and public relations. More tentative but also potentially positive relationships exist at some universities with programs in nursing, pre-medicine, medicine, prelaw, law, agriculture, and engineering. Of the 104 programs in speech communication surveyed, 34.6% reported either existing or planned activity in team teaching, cross listing of courses, cross disciplinary special projects for students, or other collaborative activity outside their own program; 44.2% reported no present or planned activity in this area.

The least heavily enrolled courses in the schools surveyed, and the courses most often dropped from the college catalog during the past five years were courses in classical rhetoric, rhetorical theory, and British and American public address.

In spite of the fact that over 70% of the speech communication faculty responding to the survey reported that the curriculum at their institutions is in flux, in spite of the fact that over 72% of the respondents are aware of attempts on their campuses to find better ways to aid students' development of basic skills, still 63% "don't know" how all this might or could affect the future of speech communication at their institutions.

Conclusions

One conclusion of this study must be that there is a crisis of self confidence, and a great lack in sense of mission and vision for the future among members of the speech communication faculty at many schools in this survey. Identity crisis comes, ironically, at a time of impending opportunity and among sources of potentially great support for speech communication programs. Concern for better courses to promote needed basic life skills, curricula across the country in flux and open to additions which can prove their worth to the development of communication skills, and growing documentation among employers that oral communication ability is a most important attribute for their employees are all strong sources of potential support for speech communication. The Fall, 1976 issue of The Journal of College Placement reported a study of 180 employers (large, corporate employers) who were asked to list attributes important in hiring new graduates into jobs. The researchers, Benson and Chasin, reported that 94% of the employers listed the most important single attribute for success in their companies to be "communicative ability." The text of the research report defined "oral communication ability" as an essential component included in the concept "communications ability".[11]

While support outside academia, i.e. employers, is strongly in support of programs in speech communication, respondents to this survey of speech communication departments often expressed concern regarding their image as a department and discipline among faculty in other departments. Opinions as to why there is confusion over "who we are and what we do" among departments outside speech communication were highly mixed.

The following conclusions seem clear:

1. Except for the basic course, which ranges from total performance orientation of the public speaking genre to interpersonal communication courses of the human relations school, few institutions presently include, or give evidence of planning to include, speech communication courses as required or recommended options in a prescribed core curriculum.

2. Speech communication, in spite of great potential support from a constituency of students and faculty and demonstrated support from employers, will remain under-utilized, in both required and elected curricula, until speech communication professionals rally themselves into a sense of positive identity, mission, and future.

3 Despite shrinking college enrollments, the need for strong speech communication programs has been documented with the documentation across the country of the basic skills "dilemma". It is up to speech communication professionals, however, to insure that the definition of "basic skills" on their campuses includes oral as well as written communications ability.

4 Because college enrollments will continue to shrink, colleges cannot afford to finance and will proceed to eliminate all duplication of courses. Cooperation and collaboration will either characterize departmental relationships, or all departments and programs who seek to compete with similar courses will suffer, especially those who seek to compete without a strong and clear conviction that their work is very important in meeting student needs.

5. Meeting the needs of all students must become the goal of speech communication programs, rather than seeking to be known as a distinguished program on the basis of large numbers of majors and graduate students. Looking backward toward the good old days only delays the progress of meeting real and important needs of present-day college students.

6 In the areas of classical rhetoric, rhetorical theory, and British and American public address, there is evidence of need to redesign courses, to collapse many specialized offerings now under utilized, and in danger of being lost to the catalog forever, into fewer, less segmented offerings of broader scope. A significant number of respondents reported courses dropped in this area because of a need for faculty development and refreshment.

7 Speech communication professionals must enter the world of marketing. Faculty members in speech communication

> must incorporate marketing concepts and strategies to insure viable continuance of the field. Marketing in our society has not always been socially responsible. Some advertising has and continues to promote the manufacture of false needs among our people. Members of the speech communication profession, however, need not involve themselves in any hucksterism, for responsible marketing is "concerned with designing an efficient and fair system which will direct...goods and services from producers to consumers and accomplish the objectives of society."[12]

The objective of curriculum committees around the country currently is to have students graduate, not as "barbarians" who know only the skills needed for one narrow vocation, but as citizens, armed with an array of skills liberal, broad, and flexible enough to insure the ability to function in many roles. Communication ability, specifically, oral communication ability, is one of the most important attributes needed by all members of our increasingly complex world. The "goods and services" of speech communication professionals are vital and, though underutilized, have strong potential support from sources both on and off campus. Real needs wait to be met, and as one esteemed member of the profession put it, "If we miss this chance, we deserve to die."

Insert Data Summary

FOOTNOTES

[1]Malcolm G. Scully, "Many Colleges Re-Appraising Their Undergraduate Curricula," Chronicle of Higher Education, 7 Feb. 1977. p. 1.

[2]New York Times, 7 Jan. 1976, P. 26, col. 1. See also 26 Oct. 1976, P. 1, col. 5. See also 10 Nov. 1976, Sect. 2, p. 4, col. 1.

[3]Scully, p. 10.

[4]"Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of the Departments," Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1975-76.

[5]James Hitchcock, "The New Vocationalism", Change, Apr. 1973. p. 48.

[6]Robert L. Jacobson, "Colleges Are Still Weak in Vocational Training, Employers Complain," Chronicle of Higher Education, 24 Jan. 1977, p. 4.

[7]John B. Stephenson, "Efficiency and Vocationalism--Renewed Challenges to Liberal Education", Liberal Education, Oct. 1974, p. 388.

[8]Stephenson, p. 389. See also "Is Vocational Education the Wave of the Future?", Change, Nov. 1975, pp. 46-48.

[9]Robert A. Goldwin, "Is it Enough to Roll With the Times?" speech reported in Higher Education and National Affairs, 24, No. 9 (1976), 4.

[10]Orville Hitchcock, "Public Address and Liberal Education," The Central States Speech Journal, (Fall 1976), 169-175.

[11]George Benson and Joseph Chasin, "Entry Level Positions," Journal of College Placement, 37, (Fall 1976), 76.

[12]E. Jerome McCarthy, Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach, (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1971), p. 75E.

DATA SUMMARY

Responses of less than 10% are not reported.

1. Is your curriculum currently under review?

No response	11.5
Yes	70.2
No	18.3

2. Is your institution moving toward a prescribed core curriculum?

No response	26.9
Yes	15.4
No	35.6
Will in the near future	16.4

3. Does your department have a representative on the College/ University Curriculum Committee?

No response	10.6
Yes	72.1

4. Does your institution have a test out program in the basic course?

Yes	50.0
No	45.2

5. Does the test out program have an affect on enrollment in the basic course?

No response	33.7
No effect	21.2
Slight affect	26.9
Not applicable	13.5

6. Is there active discussion of the basic skills problem on your campus?

Yes (very active)	54.8
No	22.1
Discussion but not active	12.5

7. Will the basic skills discussion have an impact on Speech-Communication courses at your institution?

Yes	24.0
Could	11.5
No	48.1

8. How will the basic skills discussion have an impact on your courses?

Don't know	63.5
Basic Course will become required	19.2

9. What courses are required by sources other than your department?

Basic Speech Course	40.7
Public Speaking	19.5
Interpersonal Communication	11.8

10. What is the source of the required courses?

Business departments or Schools	37.3
Fulfill General Graduation Requirements	40.3
Required by University or College	14.3

11. What courses are least heavily enrolled?

American and/or British Public Address	15.4
Rhetorical Theory	16.3
Classical Rhetoric	16.3

12. Reason for low enrollment in courses listed in #11.

No interest	29.8
Non Exciting Teachers	17.3
Lack of majors	15.5

13. Courses dropped in past five years (Absolute Freq)

Classical Rhetoric	11
Oral Interp	5
American Public Address	4

14. Which courses are more frequently recommended by other depeartments, skill/performance courses or Historical/ Literary courses?

Don't know	29.8
Skills/performance	50.0
Good balance between the two types	16.3

15. What are projections for future growth in the department?

Don't know	16.3
Slow growth	38.5
No growth or cut backs	21.1
Good growth	17.3

16. Do you or will you cross-list with other departments in the near future?

Don't know	28.8
Do cross-list, or will	34.6
Do not and will not	15.4

17. Regional breakdown of institutions surveyed.

Eastern States	19.2
Southern States	17.3
Central States	43.3
Western States	20.2

18. Is your institution tax supported?

Yes	85.6
No	14.4

19. Student enrollment of institutions by thousands.

Less than 5	1.9
5 to 6	23.1
7 to 8	5.8
9 to 10	6.7
11 to 12	3.8
13 to 14	2.9
15 to 16	11.5
17 to 18	1.0
19 to 20	10.6
21 and up	32.7

20. Number of faculty on tenure or tenure track.

1 to 3	19.2
4 to 7	16.3
8 to 11	14.4
12 to 15	22.1
16 to 19	3.8
20 to 23	9.6
24 to 27	1.0
28 to 31	5.8
32 to 35	7.7